

Syllabus – Fall 2009

JOUR 312: Introduction to Public Relations

Growth and development of public relations as a practice in business and industry, government, volunteer agencies and other public institutions. Communications and activities utilized to gain public interest and support. Prerequisite: Sophomore standing. (4 units)

Course meeting days: Monday, Wednesday – 10:10 to Noon

Classroom location: Dexter 227

Instructor:

Doug Swanson, Ed.D APR

Building 26, Room 222 Phone: 756-6705

e-mail: dswanson@calpoly.edu

Office hours: Mondays/ 12:15 to 2 p.m. ; Tuesdays/ 10:10 to noon
Wednesdays/ 1 to 2 p.m.

As a result of the CSU System furloughs, I am contractually obligated to *not work* on Fridays.
If you need to contact me in person or via e-mail, please do so Monday-Thursday.

Objectives

This lecture-based class gives an overview of public relations, a multi-faceted discipline that is grounded in journalism and strongly aligned with advertising, marketing, promotions and publicity. The class will help you understand what PR is and how it is applied to build “mutual influence and understanding” between organizations and people. Because PR skills apply everywhere in the professional world, an understanding of public relations is valuable to anyone who wants to achieve success at work.

The class will include assigned readings each week, to be supplemented by classroom lectures and discussions. Aside from the text, most course materials will be available on Blackboard. The class includes a variety of assignments to verify your understanding of PR concepts. Because public relations is a very subjective field (meaning, it’s open to interpretation) some assignments will challenge you to think critically about the structure and role of PR in actual practice, and whether or not you are comfortable with the values and professional standards we see demonstrated in the industry.

This course is structured to support the ‘Professional Values and Competencies’ of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. The course is designed to help you move from “awareness” to “understanding” and then “application” of eleven different concept areas. These include:

- The history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- The First Amendment and the rights and responsibilities it offers us as communicators.
- The appreciation of, and ability to work with, diverse people and cultures in a global society.
- The ethical pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- The critical evaluation of media-generated communication for fairness and accuracy.
- The ability to be a critical thinker who can work independently and as part of a team.

I see the syllabus as a contract between you and me. Thus, I will clearly follow the syllabus to eliminate course content surprises in terms of what's going to happen in this class. At the same time, I will encourage discussion, critique and comment. I make no assumptions about having all the answers myself and view this class as an opportunity for us to discover together what PR is and how it is evolving today.

The opportunity for learning in the classroom and online is critical to your success in this course. You are adult learners, and I expect you will approach the class and the work responsibilities with a serious attitude. We will have fun (that's my style) but at the same time we will take the learning experience in this class very seriously.

Required Texts

Lattimore et al (2009). *Public relations: The profession and the practice* (3 ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Christian, D., Jacobsen, S., & Minthorn, D. (Eds.) (2008). *The Associated Press stylebook and briefing on media law*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.

(Older editions of the books are ok, although page numbers will differ.)

The assigned readings are bedrock information for this basic PR course. Sometimes they may be directly referred to in class. Other times they will not – and the class material will build from the basic information presented in the text. Weekly lecture/discussion topics (see calendar) generally follow the chapter topics. Listen to the podcasts that you will find on Blackboard. They will help clarify concepts discussed in the books and in class. When you need to have your book in class, you'll be informed in advance. Most of the time you won't. However, you should read the material and know it well.

Much of our class discussion of PR will focus on its application in today's popular culture. Therefore, I ask that you stay aware of what's going on in "the real world" through regular reading of one or more significant national publications (newspapers/ magazines). Consider *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, or the *Wall Street Journal*; *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, etc. All can be accessed on the web or read in the library. The more you know about current events, the more able you will be to recognize and understand public relations at work in the world.

Policies relating to academic performance in this course

Please read this section very carefully.

The following policies are designed to make the course expectations clear, and the course requirements fair to everyone. They are also designed to help prepare you for ‘the real world’ which is much more unforgiving than ours when it comes to issues of personal involvement and work quality.

Attendance

Attendance in class is a university expectation, as noted in the university catalog. While attendance is important and valued, I am here to teach. I do not wish to expend valuable class time taking roll. Likewise, I’d rather not use up time to deal with absence excuses, doctor’s notes, etc.

Here’s how we’ll deal with the attendance/ class absence issue:

In my classes, there are no “excused” absences per se. I will allow you to miss up to 4 class meetings *with no penalty*. However, upon the 5th absence, the highest grade you may earn in this class will be a B, regardless of your academic performance. There are no exceptions to this policy.

A roll sheet will be passed at the beginning of each class session. It is your responsibility to sign the roll sheet. At the end of class, the roll sheet is returned to my office and if you have not signed, your absence is official. (In other words, if you are here but didn’t sign, you were absent. Sorry.)

If you know in advance you will be absent from class on particular day(s), it is to your advantage to let me know ahead of time. This is especially important if there will be assignments due. See below.

Academic preparation

The university recommends that you spend 25 to 35 hours a week in study to be successful if you are a full-time college student: <http://www.advising.calpoly.edu/handbook/For-students/25-35.htm>

I agree. The courses I teach are complex, and much ‘background’ knowledge is essential to master public relations concepts. To be successful in this course, you should dedicate *at least five hours a week* to reading and study of the materials online and in the textbooks. Use the learning objectives (on Blackboard) as your guide and ask lots of questions.

See the section on **Academic honesty** below.

Assignment submissions

Some of the work for this class will be completed on Blackboard, through the automated test feature. If you have not used this Blackboard feature in another class, I strongly recommend that you take the tutorial and familiarize yourself with how the system works:

https://blackboard.calpoly.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_11_1

Pay attention to all the assignment/ test details and explanations given in class. Ask questions about anything you do not understand.

Late penalties – Blackboard work

If you miss an assignment or test on Blackboard because you forgot to attempt the work, or the item timed out, or you got disconnected, there will be no make-ups. No exceptions. Be VERY careful as you work.

Late penalties – other work

For assignments collected in class, due dates will be clearly given well in advance. Assignments will be collected in class and, then, after that collection, **any assignment submitted up to 24 hours late will be penalized 20%**. The penalty will increase by 20% each day. Beyond the fourth day after an assignment's due date, the assignment is of no point value.

University policy says that students who expect to make up missed work “*must inform the instructor of their intent in a timely manner.*” Therefore, if you anticipate being absent from class or unable to make a Blackboard deadline, see me ahead of time to made arrangements for assignment submission.

The term project will not be accepted late under any circumstances. If you do not show up at the scheduled time to take the final exam, a score of 0 will be recorded.

Final exam: Monday, December 7, 10:10 a.m. to 1 p.m. – *this is the only final exam time.*

Assignment evaluation

Generally speaking, I evaluate assignments according to a guideline as follows:

Excellent writing – 90 to 100% of points possible

The work is of the highest quality. All questions are addressed in detail. The use of language is appropriate for the assignment and for the reader/ public/ audience. All ideas presented are original and supported by evidence in accordance with the assignment instructions. Nothing could be added to significantly improve the work. There are no errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or AP format.

Very Good writing – 80 to 90% of points possible

The subject is covered well. Ideas are expressed competently. There is a consistent point of view and logical arguments. However, one or more key concerns of the assignment have not been fully addressed. Perhaps an important question wasn't addressed in depth or breadth, or a disputable claim was made without sufficient support for the claim. The work likely contains typographical errors or text that is inconsistent with AP style.

Good writing – 70 to 80% of points possible

What you created has potential but the subject is fairly underdeveloped and/ or uninteresting. It may lack sufficient detail. It is likely there are missing elements or numerous copy errors. Perhaps you did not understand the assignment, or did not address it in the depth needed.

Poor writing – Less than 70% of points possible

The work inadequately addresses the subject, has an inconsistent point of view, is disorganized, lacks major important elements, or has an overwhelming number of copy errors that make the work unacceptable.

Grading

Grades in this class are earned, and based completely on points (with the exception of the absence penalty noted above). There is no curve or other 'formula' involved. There is no extra credit. Your final grade will be based on the number of points you earn during the term.

Assignments (seven) @ 100 points each	700
Tests (five) @ 100 points each	500
Term Project	300
Final Exam	500
Total = 2,000 points possible	

See specific assignment details on Blackboard and/ or elsewhere in this syllabus.

Your earned points will determine the final grade earned.

	Percentage of total points (approx.)	Final letter grade	Total points
Superior attainment of course objectives	Greater than 92%	A	1,840 +
Superior attainment of course objectives	90% - 92%	A-	1,800 – 1,839
Good attainment of course objectives	87% - 89%	B+	1,740 – 1,799
Good attainment of course objectives	83% - 86%	B	1,660 – 1,739
Good attainment of course objectives	80% - 82%	B-	1,600 – 1,659
Acceptable attainment of course objectives	77% - 79%	C+	1,540 – 1,599
Acceptable attainment of course objectives	73% – 76%	C	1,460 – 1,539
Acceptable attainment of course objectives	70% - 72%	C-	1,400 – 1,459
Poor attainment of course objectives	60% - 69%	D	1,200 – 1,399
Non-attainment of course objectives	59% or less	F	1,199 or less

Grades are recorded promptly in the Blackboard gradebook. Please check your grades regularly to make sure that everything recorded for you is correct. If you see an error, tell me promptly. On the day of the last class meeting before the final exam, the assignment grades that have been entered for you stand as entered – and no requests for correction will be considered.

Academic honesty

Since all six tests and many of the assignments for this class will be completed through Blackboard, I obviously trust that you will work independently and honestly. I use Blackboard because I would rather invest time in helping you learn than in grading papers.

In exchange for my trust in your independence and honesty, I hope you will want to learn as much as you can about PR because you will find it an enjoyable and relevant subject. I hope you will work faithfully to understand the concepts of public relations and apply them thoughtfully to real-world experiences. To do this, you will need to invest your time in reading the materials, thinking deeply about what we have discussed in class, and being observant to PR strategies in the world around you. In JOUR 312, learning comes through reading, discussion, study and observation – not through cramming and memorizing. This will become increasingly evident as we move forward in the term.

There are serious concerns in the university community in regard to cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty. However, I am a professor and not a policeman. In the end, *you* will be the one to gain from – or suffer from – the ethical decisions you make in pursuit of your degree.

(Because plagiarism is a big problem in academe, I perform electronic searches to verify the originality of content and the accuracy of reported sources in term papers. Do not plagiarize. If in doubt about sourcing, ask me. Plagiarized term papers/ projects do not earn credit and may require me to file a report of academic dishonesty with the College of Liberal Arts. Let's not go there.)

Accommodations

Cal Poly is committed to providing equal access to university programs and services for all students. Under university policies and federal and state law, students with documented disabilities are entitled to “reasonable accommodations” to ensure an equal opportunity for class performance. If you have a disability, or think you may have one, please contact Cal Poly’s Disability Resource Center <http://drc.calpoly.edu/> as soon as possible. I will work with you on accommodations, but you must first register with DRC.

If you are having any kind of difficulty that hinders your full participation in the academic experience - get help! There is lots of assistance on campus for students who need academic advising, personal counseling, social support, or medical information/ services. You have paid for this help through your fees and you should never hesitate to get the support you need, when you need it. If you are not sure where to seek assistance, ask me!

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prevents me from discussing your academic performance with others (e.g., your parents). If you wish to waive your right to privacy in regard to your educational records, you must go to the CLA dean’s office, speak with the associate dean, and sign a FERPA waiver. See me if this is an issue of concern for you.

Portfolio materials

If you are planning a career in journalism, public relations, or any of the communication fields, you will need to assemble a portfolio of professional work to potential employers. It is wise to make copies of all course work that might be relevant for this portfolio. I will be happy to meet with you outside of class to help you with your portfolio and related materials (resume, cover letter, etc.).

Grades are kept in Blackboard, and this method has proven to be very reliable. However, in the event of a discrepancy, it is important for you to have accurate records. Save a copy of all work you submit for this class. Please save a copy of all graded work returned to you.

Cultural Diversity

Cal Poly’s Journalism Department is committed to cultural diversity in its curriculum. It is our intent that courses in our department will include in their content the study of how we communicate effectively and ethically with diverse publics. We want students to be intellectually challenged on diversity issues, and become critical thinkers in this subject area. At the same time, we want students to enjoy our courses and feel that their individual background and experiences help contribute to the learning by all students in each journalism class.

As the instructor of JOUR 312, I want you to be comfortable in your learning, both inside and outside of class. (With the recognition, of course, that higher levels of learning will always make us feel a bit uncomfortable, because higher learning challenges our preconceived notions about life!) I also want your learning to include the understanding that the diversity of background and experiences that you and other students bring to this class is a resource for helping us master the

concepts of public relations. Indeed, successful PR *cannot be accomplished* without a proficient understanding of how to work in a diverse, respectful environment in which constantly changing publics are targeted in ways that are respectful of the values of those publics.

I work hard to present materials and hold discussions that are insightful on diversity issues and respectful of individual students concerns, in terms of cultural background, religion, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, level of physical ability, and so forth. Your suggestions about how to improve the value of diversity in JOUR 312 are encouraged and appreciated. Please tell me how I can improve the learning effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students.

In scheduling assignments and tests, I have attempted to avoid conflicts with major religious holidays. If, however, I have inadvertently scheduled work that creates a conflict with your religious observances, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make other arrangements.

‘My door is always open’ for you to come see me about any concerns you have in regard to the respectful treatment of differing perspectives in JOUR 312.

Assignment descriptions

- ✓ Assignments - descriptions will be posted as Word documents in Blackboard. (Go to the ‘Assignments’ folder.) Assignments will be completed on paper and turned in on the dates shown on the course calendar.
- ✓ Tests will be completed on Blackboard. All tests will open and close on specific dates. See the course calendar.
- ✓ Final Exam – in-class, on paper, closed-note, closed book, comprehensive exam. The final will involve true-false and multiple-choice questions. A Scantron sheet will be required. An in-class review will be conducted for the exam (with a review sheet).
- ✓ Term Project – This is a hands-on public relations project. You may choose an option that is more ‘theoretical’ in nature, or you may choose an option that is more practically oriented. See below:

Option 1: Mini Campaign

This project will involve you in different facets of public relations through hands-on experience. You will begin by contacting an organization in need of PR services. You will do a consultation to determine some *limited* needed services (strong emphasis on *limited*); then, you’ll provide the services as a volunteer. Finally, you will analyze the effects of your work, and write a brief presentation of what transpired. I have clients looking for PR assistance, so discuss with me before you begin because I can help!

Choose a group to work for. You may do PR work for a small business, a community non-profit organization, your church, or an on-campus organization or club. Limitations: You may not “double dip” by doing work for an organization with whom you are already working for academic credit. Please avoid proposing services for a bar or a band. (Why? It has been my experience that “bar PR” means being a barfly. “Band PR” means being a groupie. We can do better than that.)

Conduct a consultation. Learn as much as you can about the organization (which is now your client) and what its needs are. What small, immediate PR needs might you be able to meet, based on what you've learned in this class? Is it really PR you're doing - or is it sales, marketing, or something else? (That's not necessarily a disqualifier, just discuss it with me.)

Create a plan. Propose two or three specific services. Keep your proposal *brief* as suggested below. Work with your client to fine-tune this plan to the expectations of the group. Again I say: Is it really PR you're doing - or is it sales, marketing, or something else? (Discuss it with me.)

Carry out the plan. Carry out the services you promised, in the way you suggested, and within the time frame required.

Analyze. Report the results. How well did everything go? Was the project carried out the way you expected? What about the client's expectations? Write a report of 5-7 pages in length (typed, double-spaced), to fully describe what took place in each of the steps (above) you went through. Include any relevant work samples as appendix pages.

Here's some suggestions:

A campus group you belong to is planning to raise funds to help out the local shelter for victims of domestic violence. You are appointed by the group to handle PR for this important event. You help determine the date for the fundraising bake sale. You write a news release and send it to local media. You launch a Facebook site. On the date of the bake sale, you're there to help out and make sure everything goes smoothly. Finally, you arrange for the local newspaper to take a photo and write a story when the funds are turned over to the shelter.

A friend is going to start his own auto detailing business. You help him out by working with him to design a business card and brochure to distribute to potential customers. You introduce your friend to Twitter and show him how to use it to make contacts with potential customers. You make suggestions about where your friend could wisely spend advertising dollars. Finally, you write a news release for the local newspaper so people can find out about this new business.

My greatest concern with this project is that you don't go "over your head" by getting involved in something that's too big for you to handle. Limit yourself! I would rather have you take on a small project with only 2-3 tasks and do them very well than take on a big project and be over-burdened (and possibly disappoint the client, as well). If you wait until the last three weeks of the term to get this project going, your chances of success are extremely limited and your grade will reflect that.

Option 2: Interview / Term Paper

Choose a specific *ethical issue* that relates to PR and is of concern today to PR professionals or those who work in a closely aligned field involving work in media or computer-mediated communication. Give some brief background: Why is this an issue of concern, and how has it developed to become so? Next, interview two professionals (people working full-time in the field), to find out how the

issue has surfaced in the course of their work and how they respond. What standards do they use to help them make decisions? What are the penalties for the wrong ethical choices?

For example: You could choose to focus on the issue of VNRs (Video News Releases) and the release of VNRs from PR agencies to TV news operations as if the VNR is, in itself, “news.” First, do a little background research. What is a VNR, what are the ethical issues involved, and how big is the problem (if it is a problem, according to your research)?

Then, interview a local PR person. What’s their agency’s policy on VNRs? What do they think of the issue? Have they ever gotten into a conflict over the use of a VNR? Etc. Then, interview a producer from an area TV station. What’s the policy in that person’s newsroom? Who makes decisions about content--and how are the decisions made? What input does the reporter get in the process? What if the reporter believes management’s policy on VNR use to be ethically suspect? (and so forth).

Present your findings in report form, making sure to extensively quote those people you interview and giving plenty of examples to support what they told you. Include your opinion on the issue, based on your conversations with these professionals and your review of literature. Our target here is for interviews with at least two working professionals, a report of at least 10 pages in length, and included in that report at least five academic/ scholarly sources to support your position and findings.

Course Calendar

Wk	Dates	Topic	Assignment	Tests	Readings
1	Wed., Sept. 23	Class Introduction History / Profession of PR			Lattimore Ch. 1, 2
2	Mon., Sept. 28	Theory & Research	#1		Lattimore, Ch. 3, 5
	Wed., Sept. 30				
3	Mon., Oct. 5	Strategic Planning	#2	#1	Lattimore, Ch. 6
	Wed., Oct. 7				
4	Mon., Oct. 12	Communication and Evaluation	#3		Lattimore, Ch. 7, 8
	Wed., Oct. 14				
5	Mon., Oct. 19	Media Relations	#4	#2	Lattimore, Ch. 9, 10 AP Stylebook (general review) + read <i>About the AP</i>
	Wed., Oct. 21				
6	Mon., Oct. 26	Event Planning			
	Wed., Oct. 28	Publics		#3	Lattimore, Ch. 11, 12 Review <i>AP Business Guidelines</i>
7	Mon., Nov. 2	Crisis	#5		Lattimore, Ch. 16, 17
	Wed., Nov. 4	Government & Politics	#6	#4	Lattimore, Ch. 14, 15
8	Mon., Nov. 9	Dr. Swanson is attending the PRSA national convention in San Diego. There will be no class meetings on these days. (Nov. 11 is an academic holiday.)			
	Wed., Nov. 11				
9	Mon., Nov. 16	Legal Issues			Lattimore, Ch. 4 <i>AP: Briefing on Media Law</i>
	Wed., Nov. 18			#5	
10	Mon., Nov. 23	Ethics	#7		Lattimore, Ch. 4, 17 (review)
	Wed., Nov. 24	Academic Holiday			
11	Mon., Nov. 30	Careers/ Future Trends			
	Wed., Dec. 2				
12	Mon., Dec. 7 10:10 a.m. – 1 p.m.		Project Due	Final Exam	

Assignments (seven) @ 100 points each

700

Tests (five) @ 100 points each

500

Term Project

300

Final Exam

500

Total = 2,000 points possible